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## Health Canada wants your opinions on long-term care services

The federal government has launched public online consultations to support the development of a Safe Long-Term Care (LTC) Act.

The development of the Safe LTC Act complements the federal government's ongoing work with provinces and territories to help support improvements in home and community care, including palliative care, and LTC, according to a news release.

The online consultation invites Canadians, including LTC residents and their families, to share their perspectives and expertise on how to improve the quality and safety of LTC, foster the implementation of the LTC standards, address human resources challenges, and strengthen accountability in the LTC sector.

This feedback will help inform the drafting of the legislation.

Health Canada recently launched this new consultation tool, asking Canadians to support the development of new standards for long-term care in Canada. The government is seeking input and opinions from Canadians on what they believe are the key concerns for the delivery of long-term care services, including:

- Seniors
- Persons with disabilities
- "Carers/family/friends"
- Health, social and community care and service providers or volunteers
- "Groups working with or representing older adults, persons with disabilities, Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,



intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (SGLGBTQ+) communities, newcomers, cultural minority communities, Indigenous communities, etc.

"Researchers and academics

"All other interested Canadians and organizations

Health Canada said the development of a new law for long-term care is part of a federal commitment to support senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Health Canada said this follows the release of two independent LTC standards from CSA Group and the Health Standards Organization (HSO), "which provide guidance for delivering services that are safe, reliable and - most importantly - centred on residents' needs."

Health Canada said creating a new law falls in line with the creation of improved standards for long-term care and it was during the COVID-19 pandemic that Canadians in every province witnessed the failure of

Canadians will soon be able to access and apply for more federal government services online - from passports to payments, says Canada's first minister of citizens' services.

Terry Beech says he's also open to innovation and using new technologies like artificial intelligence to improve the way the government delivers services to Canadians.

"I think, fundamentally, it's my job to wake up every day thinking about how we're improving the customer service experience for Canadians," Beech said in an interview with CBC News.

Beech's appointment to the newly created position comes as the government has been hammered in headlines and by the opposition in recent months over problems delivering basic services to Canadians.

News reports have featured images of long lines and people camping out to apply for passports. In the House of Commons, Conservative MPs have repeatedly talked about a "broken" government, saying lineups have been getting longer, backlogs bigger and services slower.

Details to be ironed out.

While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau created the new position of citizens' services minister, and handed it to Beech, a former tech entrepreneur, many of the details have yet to be ironed out.

While the Department of Employment and Social Development (ESDC) is designated in an order in council to "provide support" and Service Canada will report to him, Beech acknowledges that he does not yet know just what services he will oversee and which services may remain under the umbrella of other government departments.

"Exactly where the footprint starts

## Canadian government services to become 'digital first'



and finishes those and fuzzy lines around what we could do or what we should be doing or what we might do in the future, all that is to be defined," Beech explained. "I don't have a mandate letter yet."

Among the programs Beech hopes to oversee is the new national dental program.

One priority for Beech will be to make federal government services to Canadians "digital first" and "digital by design."

"I'm sure there will be some people that get concerned when we talk about digital first," Beech said. "Digital first does not mean that we won't have in-person options or options over the telephone. But for those people that are more comfortable being served digitally, making those options available."

One area where big changes are in the works is passports, said Beech. The backlog last year, which hit

316,000 applications at its peak, resulted in officials learning more about how to improve passport services, he said.

"There's a new intake system that's going to be more efficient, it's called Tempo," Beech said. "We have new printers for the new passports. They're five times faster than the legacy systems."

How Canadians apply for those passports will also be changing, he said.

"If you think about passport lineups at passport offices or Service Canada offices, in the very near future here, you're not going to actually have to go to a passport office," he explained. "And if you do choose to go to a passport office, the lines there will be significantly reduced because people who prefer to transact with the government of Canada online will have the ability to do so."

Updating legacy infrastructure

figure out how we can integrate that expertise into the customer service experience for Canadians."

Beech also wants the delivery of government services to be more accountable and more transparent. For example, making data on service standards and call times public.

"If you Google a restaurant, you can see when the peak times are," Beech explained, citing an example of a call to the Canada Revenue Agency. "Well, why can't we provide the data on what the average wait time is now? So you know before you call... if you call on a Thursday afternoon, that's our lowest time."

"We should be problem solvers"

Beech is also interested in exploring ways that artificial intelligence may be able to improve the delivery of government services.

"There is no doubt that when we talk about the customer service experience, when we talk about the utilization of data and being able to be flexible and innovative and to provide services that keep up with things that we're seeing in the private sector, that we need to be thinking about those things," said Beech. "And I'm certainly excited to consider those opportunities."

In the end, Beech said his goal is to make the delivery of federal government services faster, more secure and more user-friendly.

"The government of Canada provides services to Canadians at every stage of their life, and really we should be there to be helpful," he said. "We shouldn't be a pain in your butt, right? ... We should be a solution-oriented customer-service-providing entity that Canadians are proud of and excited to interact with."

"We should be problem solvers."

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## Unemployment inches up to 5.5% in July with spike in wage growth

There was little change to Canada's job market in July as the unemployment rate inched up over to slightly 5.5 per cent, according to data released by Statistics Canada on Friday.

Most notably, compensation for workers spiked up, as average hourly wages grew five per cent after similar gains in May and June.

The Canadian economy lost 6,400 jobs, with the unemployment rate increasing for a third consecutive month as the growing population's demand for work outpaces job creation. Economists had predicted a gain of 25,000 jobs.

Dawn Desjarlais, chief economist at Deloitte Canada, said that while the job report was weaker than expected, "we're not looking at a terrible labor market by any stretch."

Canada's high immigration rate has contributed to a demand for work that outpaces job creation, and unemployment rates are rising in tandem, she added.

"Over time you would anticipate that that would lead to lower wage growth, which of course is sort of what the



central bank is looking for easing up in the inflation pressures."

Other economists differed on what the Bank of Canada might do next. Andrew Grantham, a senior economist with CIBC, wrote in a note that the combination of job loss and wage growth would mean mixed messages for the central bank as it switches for signs that inflation is cooling down.

"Today's data is unlikely to convince the Bank of Canada that the labour market has loosened enough yet to sustainably achieve its 2.1 per cent inflation target, despite the weaker headline job count."

Desjarlais senior economist Royce

Edward Island, with declines in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Other provinces held steady.

Labour market more challenging recently, says one jobseeker.

With a demand for work on the upswing, crowds of students and seasonal workers lined up in Toronto on Wednesday for the Canadian National Exhibition's annual job fair.

Lucky applicants will work at The Ex, an end-of-summer event at Exhibition Place that attracts about 1.4 million people each year. Job seekers arrived with applications in hand, hoping for a summer gig with one of the event's hundreds of vendors.

Laurel Fielding, who was waiting to apply for a cashier position, said the job market has been a little bit more challenging over the last few months. A summer job fell through, bringing her to The Ex.

"I think there's a lot of opportunity, but it seems like employers are getting a little bit pickier," she said.

"I was looking for something easy that I could do that was fun and not too challenging. But I think after this I definitely want to challenge myself a little bit more."

Darrell Brown, CEO of the Canadian National Exhibition Association, told CBC News that the event's job fair turnout this year was "tripled or quadrupled" from last year.

## Canada's inflation rate is falling, so why are grocery prices still so expensive?

Canada's inflation rate tumbled to 2.8 per cent in June, reaching the country's target range for the first time in more than two years - what Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland hailed as "a milestone moment."

So why are Canadians still feeling the pinch at their local grocery stores? Economists say there are a number of factors driving up food prices in Canada, which were up 9.1 per cent year-over-year in June. But they expect food inflation to slow over time.

"(There's) a combination of very many different things pretty much working collectively to push food prices higher," Claire Fan, an economist at RBC, told CTV News in an interview.

"Everybody would love there to be a single demon we could name, but the truth is that there's a bunch of little factors, there's a bunch of straws building up on the camel's back," said Will Huggins, who teaches finance and business economics at McMaster University in Ontario.

Here's a look at some of the factors behind Canada's high grocery prices and what to expect in the coming months.

**CANADIAN DOLLAR DECLINES IN VALUE**  
Canadians may have noticed that fresh fruit and vegetables, in particular, are pricey.

Huggins said one of the reasons for that is that the value of the Canadian dollar has fallen against the U.S. dollar by about 10 per cent.

In May 2021, \$1 CAD was the equivalent of 81 cents USD, whereas now, \$1 CAD is worth roughly 75 cents USD.

This decline in the value of the Canadian loonie means that whatever Canada imports from the U.S. is more expensive and prices of certain produce at grocery stores has increased to reflect the change.

"So everything we buy from America costs 10 per cent more than it did two years ago," Huggins explained.

"Avocados are 10 per cent more expensive because we don't grow them here. Lemons, oranges, anything that's like this that isn't grown in Canada has seen a sort of increase in its costs, simply because the price of the Canadian dollar doesn't buy as



much."

**EXTREME WEATHER AND CLIMATE CHANGE**  
Adverse weather conditions are partly to blame for higher food costs.

With extreme weather events like droughts, wildfires and flooding becoming more frequent in Canada and around the world, as a result of climate change, Fan said farm production and supply chains are impacted, applying some pressure on overall food inflation.

Severe drought conditions in the Prairies, for example, caused domestic crop production to drop sharply in 2021.

Extreme weather is one of the major threats that RBC has identified for food inflation for the upcoming decade, Fan noted, because it will likely lead to "a lot more volatility and uncertainty."

"When you have one weather event impacting one type of crop largely, you wouldn't see persistently high food inflation," she explained.

"But when you have the scale of these severe weather events happening frequently enough, and especially in the United States, which is our top importer, where we import most of our fruits and veggies from... and we have this happening elsewhere as well, where we import some of our other grocery products, that's when it really becomes a problem."

Throughout human history, the weather has "enormously affected" food production and costs, said Huggins, noting that extreme weather events "can complicate things without question" by damaging farm equipment and infrastructure, as well as creating a delay in getting materials or goods to the market, which has a direct cost as well.

However, barring "enormous climatic changes," the economist said

he doesn't expect climate change to create "continued major pressure" on food prices in Canada and that the country could actually stand to benefit from certain climatological shifts.

"Even though there will be adjustment costs, obviously, our super cold country is about to become a little bit warmer, so it creates opportunities to some extent for us in that regard," said Huggins.

"We will gain some, we will lose some without question, but compared to many other countries, we're in a great position when it comes to climate change."

**GEOLOGICAL TURMOIL**  
The Russia-Ukraine war is another factor that has led to higher food prices in Canada.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in additional upward pressure on global food prices due to the role the two countries play in agricultural and oil production. It led to a surge in prices of wheat, fertilizer and natural gas.

And while the potential impacts of the collapse of the Black Sea grain deal have yet to be seen, Huggins said there could still be reason for concern.

Brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July 2022, the deal allowed Ukraine to export grain from its seaports despite the ongoing war. Russia walked out of the deal last month after saying its demands to ease sanctions on its own grain and fertilizer exports had not been met.

The damage to Ukraine's food growing and processing industry during the war is also going to create "major problems," he said.

"We usually keep inventory against disruptions, but the fact is that there's not as much coming into the back end of the warehouse anymore; certain things are actually starting to

seriously get disrupted," he said.

"The collapse of the Black Sea grain deal has the potential to create a lot of problems. The grain deal worked a little bit for a while, but we're going to start feeling the pain that we anticipated last year."

Fortunately, North America is "largely insulated" from these problems because it does have a lot of domestic food production, Huggins noted.

"So as much as it hurts us, we have to remember that we don't have to make comparisons about feeding which kid," he added.

**SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES STEMMING FROM THE PANDEMIC**

Global supply chain bottlenecks stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic drove up food prices as well, but the supply chain has started to normalize, both Fan and Huggins noted.

"The bottleneck for machinery used on farms is one example that has driven up prices in Canada, said Huggins, adding there is a "backlog of orders for farm machinery in Canada stretching into next year."

"The machinery backlog is working its way out; we don't have as many supply side problems in terms of COVID compared to say, a year or two years ago," he said.

"So we are still experiencing some of this sort of COVID hangover in the agricultural sector."

**LABOUR SHORTAGES**  
Another problem that Canada has "in the pipeline" is labour shortages in the agricultural sector, the economist said, which will likely add extra pressure on food prices.

Huggins said farmers moving into retirement and a lack of Canadians wanting to work in the agricultural sector are going to lead to a supply issue of physical workers.

Therefore, Canada may have to invest in more machinery, which will require fewer people to do the physical labour on farms, or employ more people to work in the sector.

"The idea is to be clear-eyed about what our supply side problems are in food over the next few years and to try to get ahead of it," said Huggins.

**BIG GROCERS DICTATING FOOD PRICES**  
Many Canadians have pointed the finger at big corporations for how expensive groceries have become over the past few years, but Huggins said the issue of high food prices is a bit more complex.

In Canada, five retailers - Loblaw, Sobeys, Metro, Walmart and Costco - control an estimated 80 per cent of the grocery market share, according to a 2021 study from the federal government.

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